

## Knowledge and Awareness of Female Sex Workers on HIV/AIDS (Special reference to Beed district of Maharashtra)

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**Introduction:**

**H**uman immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a condition caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus. HIV spreads through transfusion of the contaminated blood, unprotected sex, Sharing hypodermic needles with HIV positive person, and from infected parent to child (During pregnancy and delivery). It is fact that HIV is non curable infection and Prevention is the only way to protect yourself. Hence, the government is also given the special attention on the awareness program for protecting vulnerable population. The global level programs have focus on providing prevention services to all and affordable treatment to the people living with HIV.

The worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic is one of the most serious concerns to human life. In 2017, approximately 36.9 million people were infected with HIV, of this, 1.8 million were children who are below 15 years old. According to the global reports more than 1.3 million people died due to the HIV-related illnesses. In the context of India, HIV prevalence is estimated at 0.22% among the 15-49 age group, while 87.58 thousands are newly infected. At the national level, 69.11 thousand people died due to AIDS-related causes.

The HIV epidemic is not only affecting the health of individuals, but also it impacts on their families, communities, and even nations too. In recent years, globally government and non-government organizations have instigated the need of fight against the HIV/AIDS through a comprehensive and integrated health care services including awareness, prevention, treatment, care and support. Several organizations i.e. the World Health

Organization, United Nations program on HIV/AIDS- (UNAIDS), and The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are playing a vital role in prevention on various levels. Such as providing services to the global community, helping them to access the health services, support to capacity building of the healthcare service providers, strengthen the social and financial aspects and also ensuring the quality of services through providing inputs to the national health policies for global impact. As result of that an ambitious goal has been set to address the HIV through 90-90-90 strategy. The first strategy is 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status, secondly, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy and lastly, 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

**Objectives:**

1. To study the knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS among female sex workers.
2. To assess the awareness and knowledge regarding sexually transmitted infections.
3. To understand source of information about HIV/AIDS

**Methodology:**

The selection of the sample by probability as well as non-probability sampling method have been used. The cluster sampling have done by probability and individuals (respondents) were selected by peer educators support model by non-probability sampling. The study conducted on knowledge and awareness of female sex workers about HIV/AIDS, STI and source of information. For present paper prepared interview scheduled and data collection have done with adequate preparation.

As per the community organization of MMM there were 800 female sex workers in Beed district. Accordingly, a simple random sampling method selected from available estimated number. There were total of 80 respondents were selected from the data which is 10% representation of the female sex workers for the study.

#### **Data Collection:**

Data collection have done through primary and secondary sources for the study. The primary data have collected through the interview schedule, focus group discussions and observations. The schedule comprised of open and close-ended questions which were comprised by,

- a) Respondents profile
- b) Knowledge and Awareness of respondents towards HIV/AIDS
- c) Source of Information about HIV/AIDS and STI

The secondary data collected through the health department's report and government and non-organizational surveys and records.

The interviews were conducted in the local language and all the respondents were clearly informed about the objective of the study. The consent has taken (mostly verbal) in presence peer educator for participating in the study. Adequate privacy ensured and maintained during all the interviews and participants had the authority and liberty to call off the interview at any stage.

#### **Findings:**

##### **Personal Profile of the Respondents:**

The average age of the respondent's female sex worker was between 30 – 40 years i.e. 73.5% whereas 27.5% of respondents belonged to their age 18-30 years. Hence the majority of the respondents were in the core group of an adult.

The education of the female sex workers 60 % were illiterate hence they are not able to read and write, while 22% could able to read and write, their education up to primary level only.

As per the national Aids control organization, there is a typology of the Female sex workers on the basis of their soliciting point e.g. Home base, Brothel base, Lodge base, etc. Further came to know that 65.5% of respondents were belonging to the home-based population and they

were living with their families. Whereas 11% were belonging to the brothel area and they were associated with brothel owner for the time period.

##### **Awareness and Knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS:**

The study group was asked the set of questions range from ever heard about the HIV/AIDS, in this regard, all the respondents knew about the word HIV/AIDS while 24% respondents stated that HIV is also a kind of STI.

Further, it was found that 60.6% of respondents were unable to state the difference between HIV and AIDS while 39.4% affirmed that HIV and AIDS were not the same. HIV is virus and AIDS is a stage it clearly mentioned by the respondents (39.4%).

##### **Knowledge about the Causes of HIV/AIDS**

Regarding the knowledge about the route of transmission 9 % respondents were expressed that they didn't have any information about the HIV/AIDS transmission and 27.3 % respondents knew only two causes of HIV transmission i.e. by unprotected sex and infected blood. While 63.7% of respondents knew the four appropriate reasons for HIV transmission i.e. unprotected sex, infected parent to child transmission, HIV infected blood and HIV infected needle or syringe. Hence it clearly seems that 91% of the respondents were aware of unprotected sex and infected syringe as the main cause of HIV transmission.

##### **Awareness about HIV Treatment and Prevention Methods:**

It is observed that 72 % respondents stated HIV is non-curable and 14% confessed that they were unaware whether it is curable or not, remaining 14% had in the impression that HIV is a curable disease.

Of the interviewed 90% of the respondents were aware of the treatment of HIV/AIDS. When asked about the details of treatment on HIV/AIDS, 72% respondents were aware of the Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) while 28% respondents were aware of the treatment but failed to explain the exact name of treatment. Thus, almost all respondents under study were aware of the treatment of HIV/AIDS. Further, responded reported that during the pregnancy if pregnant women receive proper treatment then the child will not be infected, but they

are unable to provide detail medication and name of the treatment.

Further, it is inquired about the preventive measures of the HIV/AIDS 92% were mentioned that condom is the trusted way of prevention.

With regard to the vulnerability of acceleration of HIV transmission, the investigator assessed the knowledge about the Sexually Transmitted Infections and Reproductive Tract Infections, 83.6% were aware of the STI/RTI while 16.3% respondents were not aware of STI's and RTI's. Even RTI is commonly found among the women but still, the awareness and knowledge were poor among the respondents.

It is noteworthy that all the respondents have received the HIV testing service and sexual transmitted services which are provided by the integrated counseling and testing center at a government hospital. Further, it is also important to state that all the respondents knew about the testing periods e.g. every six month HIV testing and every 3 month STI testing.

In view of these, further asked about the new policy and guidelines about the HIV/AIDS mainly 90-90-90, it came to know that no one aware about the policy and strategy of the government to combat with the issue.

#### **Source of the information:**

It came to know that all the interviewed respondents were associated with non-government organization hence the peer educators and field workers provide the information on the HIV/AIDS to the female sex workers. Also, they use social media to avail the knowledge and services regarding HIV.

#### **Conclusion:**

By and large the female sex workers under study were aware of the word of HIV/AIDS but it is also important to have the proper and adequate knowledge about the causes, treatment and preventive measures, which is still needed to address. However, it is observed that female sex workers have knowledge about STI and RTI. In light of various government and non-government efforts to combat this issue to prevent HIV, greater prevention is required to change avoiding HIV.

#### **Recommendation:**

1. To conduct the continues capacity building program to provide the update knowledge on policy
2. Build the second line leadership or champions at ground level to provide the detail information
3. Develop the E-IEC which will access them easily through social media

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